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# The Hoofmarks of the Faun



*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

THE SOULS OF THE STREETS. 1904

THE STONE LADY. 1905

HIGHWAYS AND BYEWAYS IN FAIRYLAND. 1906

BOHEMIA IN LONDON (SKETCHES AND ESSAYS). 1907

A HISTORY OF STORY-TELLING. 1909

THE IMP AND THE ELF AND THE ÖGRE. 1906 & 1910

EDGAR ALLAN POE. 1910

# The Hoofmarks of the Faun

By  
Arthur Ransome

London  
**Martin Secker**  
Number Five John Street  
Adelphi

*First Published in 1911*



## NOTE

Two of the six stories in this book were written long before the others; all at considerable intervals. This must explain their apparent inequality in craftsmanship. I tried to correct them, but found that in doing so I was imposing one mood on another and blurring both with contradiction. I left them as they were. Craftsmanship is not everything, and those old moods seem to me almost worth regretting, because they are irretrievable. So I print the six stories together in a volume that has, for myself, the sentimental interest of a diary,\* and for others, perhaps, the interest of seeing, in a form very far from direct expression, various stages of boyhood and manhood. The Scandinavian dream of twenty, the would-be realism of twenty-one, and the fauns and other imaginations of later youth, represent, as it were, salutes to six of those funerals that go their way whenever one mood or vision of life reluctantly gives place to another. *L'humeur est morte: vive l'humeur.*

A.R.

\* Though the stories are not arranged in the order of their composition.



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# The Hoofmarks of the Faun

TO MY WIFE

1908



## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

UNDER Raven Crag, in the North Country, there is a grey farm with a huge granary built close under the fell, where the meadows give way to rock and bracken on the one side and deep woodland on the other. Many years ago a man from the South came to this farm with his wife and his little son, and settled down there to lead hay and milk cows and keep sheep on the fells like the North Country folk about him. Now, the little boy was not like the children of the other farms in the valley, for his hair was black and theirs was gold, his eyes were black and theirs were blue, and his cheeks were not red with the apple red of the people of the North, but with the plum red of the people of the South. And, while their fairies were the northern nisses busy about the house and the trolls

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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striding over the fells, the white elf-girls dancing in the woods and the bergfolk dwelling in the hills, his were the dryads of the oaks and the swimming naiads of the green pools and the small goat-footed fauns with silky ears who sported in the vineyards. Often a dryad had kissed his ruddy cheeks, and more than once a naiad had kissed him on the lips, rising from the green depths of her pool when he dipped his mouth in it to drink. But he was held dearest by a faun, a little goat-foot laughing creature who played bo-peep with him behind a tree, and led him jolly dances through the brushwood, or squeezed ripe grapes into his mouth when he lay half asleep. So well did the faun love him that when the southern family left the vineyards and travelled over the warm South roads and crossed the sea and came to the North Country to live under Raven Crag, the little goat-foot went secretly with



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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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them, dodging through the woods by day, and curling up at night beside his friend. He felt the air colder as they travelled north-wards, and he missed the warm suns, and shivered when he bathed in the North Country streams, but he bore all quite cheerfully for the sake of the little dark-haired boy he loved.

But after the family had settled in the farm, the little boy was set to watch sheep on the fells, instead of to scare birds from the vines, and the faun had to do his best to be contented in the woods at the head of the valley, and to play with his friend only in the twilights when his work was done. And then, too, the little boy grew up quickly, and no longer wanted to play with the faun, who could never grow up at all. Indeed, he half forgot the faun, and, since he was from the South, he could not see North Country fairies. When men move from place to place they are

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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surrounded by elf-folk different from their own. They cannot see them, and put no milk beside the door, and forget even the fairies they have known. It is the same, too, with travelling little people. The faun found the woods strangely empty. He cut a willow stick, blew out the pith and made a whistle of it with four notes ; but he played whole summer afternoons under the oak trees and no dryads came to trip their dances to his melody. He skipped from stone to stone along the beck, and, crawling out along the oak boughs that hung over the water, peered through the leaves into the deepest pools ; but no naiad put up her pretty scornful face to chide him for his impudence. He could throw nuts at the squirrels and set them quarrelling ; he could draw thorns from lambs' feet ; he could tickle swine with hazel twigs ; but the squirrels and the lambs and the pigs could never see him, and left him lonely

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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even while he played with them. At last, one night in early summer, when he had been sitting melancholy under a tree all day, playing doleful tunes on his whistle, and thinking of hot sunlight through the vine leaves and his playmates in the South and the little boy he had followed, who was now grown up and did not care for him, he came to the farm, and peeped into the windows as the dusk was falling. He saw the farm kitchen, with the hams hanging between the deep, black beams, and in the light of the log fire on the open hearth he saw his boy, a great lad now, standing with a girl. Her arms were about his neck and her golden Northern hair was spread over his shoulders, and, in the glow of the fire, her blue smock seemed brighter than the sky at twilight. The dark face of the boy was smiling as he set her hair aside and held her face between his hands.

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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The faun took his fingers off the window-sill and went off, with little, short steps, thinking about love. There was something sweeter in the world than he had known. Instead of going back to the woods, to the hollow in the big oak that was his sleeping-place, he went through the big doors into the beamed granary of the farm and flung himself upon some sacks of flour that were lying together in a corner. The last light in the sky was darkening and a ribbon of moonlight was laid across the threshold. From where he lay the faun could see a few stars above the trees through the door, and an owl flew by now and again, like a big pale moth swaying along the woodside.

Some flour had trickled from a sack that stood against the wall, and the rats, who lived in the hay, were feasting with merry squeaks. The faun could hear the hooting of the owl, and the spiders' feet as they

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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crept over the walls. With the noise of the spiders and the rats and the owl he fell asleep, dreaming also of the gold-haired girl in the farm kitchen, and of the quiet, full voice of the boy, saying sweet things to her in the firelight. Do you know that just as a noise wakes you up if you have fallen asleep in the quiet, so you start up if a noise that has lulled you to sleep comes suddenly to an end? The little faun woke up and rubbed his eyes. A stillness had come to the barn. Not a rat stirred or squeaked in the hay. The owl was not hooting. There was no noise at all, and it was just this sudden fall of silence that had waked the faun. He rubbed his eyes and stretched his little goat legs. He stared at the moonlight on the floor, and out at the stars above the trees, and watched for the owl, but it did not pass. And suddenly he felt that there was a breath in the air, and a scent of the woods mingling with the

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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scent of the flour and the hay. There was a movement in the shadows, no more, and a sweetness came into the barn, so sweet that the little faun felt a choking in his throat, would have cried for the pleasure of it—but fauns have no tears. He crouched behind the sacks and stared into the darkness and into the moonlight, but could see nothing—nothing at all; although there was such sweetness in the barn that he could scarcely breathe for joy of it. He crouched, waiting, with his little hands clasped about his knees. There was the breath in the air again, and again a movement in the shadows, and the sweetness had gone, leaving only a memory of itself. The spiders moved again on the walls, the owl hooted and the rats squeaked together in the hay :

“ How beautiful she is.”

“ And the sweet gold hair of her.”

“ And the pretty little feet of her.”

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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“And how good she is to come here night by night.”

The faun scrambled from the sacks, and looked eagerly over the white dust on the barn floor where the moonlight fell. But it had not been stirred. The rats could not see him, nor what he was doing, for he was not a North Country fairy. But they could see the elf-girl well enough, with her sweet gold hair, and her beautiful face, and her dainty little feet, for she was of the elf-folk, who have been under Raven Crag since first heather turned purple in the summer and blackthorn shone white in the spring.

All the next day the faun waited in the woods, and at night slipped into the barn, and lay down on the sacks in the corner. And again there was a silence, and he saw the bright eyes of the rats peeping from the hay. Again there came the sweetness in the air and the scent of the woods, and

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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again he could see nothing, but felt a happiness warmer than he had ever known when he sported in the vineyards of the South.

Night after night he was there. Night after night he did not sleep in his home under the big oak. Indeed, the green grass grew up round his home and ferns inside it and a dormouse made her nest in the fern. Day after day he wandered in the woods, and heard the doves cooing to each other, "Ah, it is good to be near you," and "Ah, it is good to be together." And at last there came a day when he understood what they meant.

And that night, when he was waiting in the dark corner of the barn, he crooned over a little song that he had made:

A breath along the rafters in the dark,  
A shadow in the shadows by the door,  
And light footfalls that leave not any mark,  
Nor stir the dust upon the granary floor.



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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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As I lie hid behind the sacks of corn,  
She is aloof as though I were a sin,  
And not a little amorous goat-foot faun,  
Holding my hoofs lest they should make a din.

The spider's feet are silent on the walls ;  
The owl's not hooted now for half-an-hour ;  
Her presence silences the squeaking calls  
Of rat to rat among the dusty flour.

Why does she never show herself to me ?  
Hot-eyed and lonely on the granary floor,  
Behind the sacks I hug a hairy knee,  
And watch the shadows moving by the door.

And when the elf-girl came, though he  
could not see her, yet he felt that she  
came directly towards him. He felt the  
sweetness around him, embracing him  
kissing him, and he shivered with sur-  
prised delight.

For a long time the elf-girl had known  
there was something in the barn that loved  
her more than she was loved by the rats or  
the spiders or the owl, more than she was  
loved by her own white sisters. Often,  
too, when she and her sisters were dancing

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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in the wood, she had felt the thing that loved her passing by her, though, when she looked, she could see nothing but the green moss and the trees and the squirrels and the birds. On that night she had felt the faun's love from where he lay on the sacks, and had tried hard to see him, just as he was trying to see her. But she could not. She grew as sorrowful as the faun, thinking always of the strange sweetness in the granary, as if she had known it was waiting for her and had wanted it. She thought the faun must be a creature of grace, like her own sisters, with limbs more white and delicate than theirs. She longed above all else in the world to be able to see him just for once. Her sorrows grew heavier and heavier, till she could no longer pass like a butterfly over the ground, but left footprints where she went from the weight of the sorrow that she carried.

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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One day the faun was sitting on the bough of an apple tree in the orchard of the farm, waiting for the dusk and the night and his happiness in the barn, when an apple he was biting dropped from his hands to the ground under the tree. He slipped down, and, as he bent to pick it up, saw the tiniest, lightest little footprint in the earth beside it, where there was not any grass. There was the mark of a little round heel and five little delicate toes. Close by it was another, and another, and though where there was grass he could see nothing, yet it was clear that something had gone by. He went back to the prints under the tree, and walked round them, and round them again, looking at them. They were like the footprints of the golden-haired girl he had seen with his boy, that day when the boy had climbed the apple tree and flung the apples down to her where she stood bare-footed below him.

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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Only they were much smaller. They made him oddly happy. He bent and kissed them with his little dry lips. He loved them as much as the presence in the granary, and when dark fell, instead of going there, he went skipping off to the wood, and spent the night laughing and talking to himself in the boughs of a big fir. But the next day he was ashamed; and when he searched in the orchard, and found nothing but the marks of his own little hooves, he thought perhaps he had only dreamed those tiny footprints of the day before. He climbed into the tree to wait for dusk, and was too ashamed even to steal an apple, because of his fickleness to the sweetness in the barn.

And then he heard two starlings talking in the tree next to his. He took tight hold of a bough and leaned forward to hear what they were saying. They were gossiping, as starlings do.

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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“The owl tells me she talks of nothing else but the thing in the barn. Last night, when it was not there, she went away as if she had no other friends. And we cannot even see the thing. The rats were jealous.”

“Yes, she loves it sure enough ; but she cannot see it, no more than we.”

The little faun clung tight to the branch, and would have laughed for happiness, but the starlings went on :

“She says it loves her, too, whatever it is.”

“It’s a sad sight to see her so sorrowful.”

“That’s true. I could have cried, if I had not so many cares of my own, when I saw her so weighted with her sorrow that her feet marked the earth. They used to mark it no more than you or I when we fly through the air.”

“Yes, indeed, indeed ! It was pity to see her this morning stepping as lightly as she could, and patting the earth smooth

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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where her footprints had showed. She was frightened, too, when she saw those hoofmarks all round her little feet. 'Those are not sheep marks,' she said, 'nor quite like goat's; they are the hooves of some horrible thing. Ah, if only the prints by the side of mine were made by the beautiful one in the barn, they would be light and dainty as he must be, and I, why I should be too happy to make any footprints at all.' She did not know I was hearing," the starling added, gravely. "But that shows how she loves it."

The little faun sat still in the tree. The dusk had fallen, and the moon was high in the sky. The owl was suddenly silent. He knew that the sweetness was even then looking for him in the barn. But he dared not go there. What if something should let her see him, and know that the hooves were his. They clicked mournfully together in the night, as he sat in the tree

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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watching the stars, and thinking he would never dare to go to the granary again. Before the dawn he slipped down, and peeped into the windows of the farm, where no one was stirring. He would have liked to see the boy once more. Then he went off through the woods, and out of the valley to the South, keeping to the woodland all the way. There were more trees in those days. At last he got to the sea, and they say he smuggled over into France, and went on South to the vineyards and the land of his own people.

As for the elf-girl, she is waiting for him still, and you may see her come in sadly, if you wait with the rats at night in the old barn under Raven Crag. But she does not yet know that the hoofmarks were his—and you must not tell her.





# The Footways of Dream

TO MY WIFE

1911



## The Footways of Dream

LOVE is a greedy dream that would rule all dreams, that would be lord of the phantasmagoria of day, lord also of the dreams of night. So it is that those who seek to follow him find happiness in sharing house and board, sunshine and rain, cold and heat, the crackling of winter's logs, the summer buzz of bees about the flowers, the shadow of a tree, the bursting of the chestnut buds. For everything that is shared by two is a recognition of love's sovereignty, and tribute gladly paid. They will not let God smile on one of them alone, and refuse a greeting in the street that does not warm two hearts at once. All these things they share, and many others, the silvering of hair, the memories heaped together by the years, until at last death separates them,

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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when they tell each other, for consolation, that perhaps it is not for ever.

Love and lovers hate the dreams of night, for the empery of dreams is not to be usurped, and it is hard to share in the name of love what is indivisible, and refuses to be shared. Even if lovers die in a moment together, and whisper that they have never been separated, yet is love not satisfied, for each has died to other many times before, as often as they slept. In the mornings they have returned from different journeys, and met wistfully as if from opposite ends of the earth. It is not often that two adventure together on the footways of dream.

Perhaps it is better so. Perhaps those footways are like slender bridges, that will bear one in safety but will not carry two. Lovers are hungry to adventure together, but only that which is known can be shared, and some knowledge is too strong for the weak.

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## The Footways of Dream

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Robert and Selyse in choosing a sovereign for their lives had chosen love. Of their two lives they had made one that seemed to them more beautiful than either of the others. They shared the world, and all the things that are held from the world's reach. They shared one life together, making it a cottage by the blowing pines, children that should one day be theirs, the singing of songs, and at last a withering side by side into the grave. They made a strong and laughing dream of their one life, almost forgetting as they laid their tribute at his feet that they had chosen love to be their sovereign. But love is a greedy dream that would rule all dreams, that would be lord of the phantasmagoria of day, lord also of the dreams of night.

And those of night they could not share. They slept sadly, and sleeping hand in hand they were alone. In the mornings they forebore to question of their

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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dreams, because it was grief to them to remember that they had separated so far. In collecting, with glad eyes, love's tribute of things shared, they forgot to criticise his greed, but love, in finding two so loyal servants, had no mind to forget, or to let them forget that there were some things they had not shared. And Robert, constrained by love, lay often awake, watching the face of Selyse sleeping, and hungry for the world beneath her eyelids. And Selyse, too, lay awake, and watching Robert sleeping, wept when he smiled, and, when he moaned, comforted him blindly, weeping still for the terrors that were not hers and his alike. So greedy is love.

At last one night when they had fallen asleep together, Selyse awoke in the morning, with a glad cry, looking for Robert :—

“ I saw you.”

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## The Footways of Dream

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And Robert, poor vassal of love, laughed back :

“ I saw you too at the bend of the road.”

And love laughed in his greed. For they had come to travel the same path, and follow each other in the country of dream. And they were glad, but with half a sorrow : “ What if, seeing each other before or behind at the bend of that white road, they should never come to tread it hand in hand ? ”

The footway of their dream was a firm white road. A moon shone through the naked limbs and frightened twigs of a little wood. Above all was a blue sky full of stars, and the road lay along a hill country between the world and the moon. And Robert had seen one walking before him, and had followed. At the bend of the road she had turned and laughed to him, and he had seen her face and known her for Selyse. He had walked fast, with

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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no thought of running, for there seemed to be no running on that white road. Walking was like bright wine. He walked like one who trod from star to star, but Selyse still maintained, against her will, the distance that divided them. Walk as he would, he could not catch her, and he knew she could not stay. And because they were the servants of love they woke with a shadow of sorrow across the flame of joy.

And another time they walked on this frosty road of dream. And again, striving to snatch a new tribute to love, they had sought to tread the road together. Again their happiness was shadowed with the grey shadows of despair, for love is a greedy dream, that would rule all dreams, and demands that all things should be shared. And this time Robert looked back from the bend in the road, and saw Selyse hurrying in the moonlight. She



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## The Footways of Dream

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waved to him, but he could not stay, and the footway of dream seemed endless and cruel, so fast his feet moved while his heart would lag.

Perhaps, they thought, these footways are like slender bridges, that will bear one in safety, but will not carry two. But love is a greedy dream, and they were his vassals, whose slavery was strong because it was willing. Although for many nights the road was bare, and they awoke with tales in which each other had no part, they hoped always that some morning they would be able to lay this new tribute at love's feet, carrying his sovereignty beyond the phantasmagoria of day, to proclaim it over the things of night.

And love, glad of so loyal servants, and greedy of the empery of dreams, brought it about that one night Robert and Selyse slept hand in hand, and woke with hands still clasped upon that shining road. Never

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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was the sky so blue and rich in seeded stars, and never had moonlight and the frightened twigs woven so fair a carpet for their feet. And they kissed each other and set forth, sharing a dream as they had shared all else, and setting the empery of dreams beneath love's greedy sovereignty. Love laughed, exultant, as they walked.

And as they walked, the road unwound before them between the earth and the moon. And all was sweet and clear as their own hearts, untroubled as the hearts of willing slaves. They danced together on the footway of dreams, and laughed to see their faces patterned by the moonlight.

Then in the shadow of a tree beside the road they saw one waiting for them, and heard him laughing quietly to himself. He covered his mouth with little hands, but they heard his minute silver laughter, and laughed too, glad to share his happiness,

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## The Footways of Dream

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whoever he might be, who laughed alone in the shadow of a tree on the frosty road they trod together.

And greedy love laughed, exultant that already among the things of night were intruding the unborn phantasmagoria of day. They were a proof of his sovereignty.

For as they came to the tree a little boy crept out from the shadow, and took their hands, and ran between them and laughed in their faces. They looked over his tossing curly head into each other's eyes, and were glad to share so sweet a thing, and to know that the child whose little fingers burrowed in one hand was also held by another, and that, as he gambolled between them, he shared their two hearts, and was shared by them alike. He was, they thought, another tribute to love, and, poor vassals, they were glad.

It may be that the footways of dream are like slender bridges, that will bear two

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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in safety, but will not carry three. It may be that they are broken by the phantasmagoria of day.

For a cold wind breathed along the frosty road, and blew out the light in Robert's heart, as he turned and saw that he and the child were on the road alone. The child was at a loss for how to use his other hand, and swung round, holding it for Robert. Robert nearly fell, and then lifted the child to his shoulder and carried him there. And the moon died, and the stars were gone, and the road grew dim and was no longer firm to his feet. But it was not so for the little boy, who cried out joyfully from his father's shoulder : " Oh ! see the pretty stars ! "

And Robert awoke suddenly with his face wet with tears. And he looked at Selyse still sleeping on the pillow beside him. Her face was the smiling face of an angel in heaven, who has seen all things,

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## The Footways of Dream

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and accepted all things, and shares the understanding of God.

And as he looked at her he hated her.

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For love is a greedy dream that would rule all dreams, that would be lord of the phantasmagoria of day, lord also of the dreams of night, but only that which is known can be shared, and some knowledge is too strong for the weak.



# Peter Swainson : A Criticism

TO MARTIN SECKER





## Peter Swainson : A Criticism

A SINGLE book is not often a sufficient weapon with which to conquer immortality, in these days when men attack the sacred walls with battering-rams and seek to overwhelm them with a bulk of volumes. A single book whose publication is almost unnoticed, a book that hardly sells a hundred copies, is no very certain guarantee of fame. Peter Swainson died too soon. Yet there have been solitary works that have survived, and given by their continuance of life a little of eternity to their authors, whether or not their names remain to label their success. Nicolette still builds her cell with leaves of the oak and flowers of the lily, and we do not know that she ever had a sister. Villon published but one volume, and that not until his black and scarlet vagabondage

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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had been ended for a quarter of a century. Lazarillo de Tormes and his beggar man walk without kinsmen of their blood upon the roads of Spain. And many writers who have written more than one volume live by one alone. We read *The Vicar of Wakefield* but forget *The Citizen of the World*. The two-fold stream of Undine still circles her lover's grave, while the dust lies thick upon the withered leaves of Fouqué's other books. But Swainson had given more promise than achievement. For what he suggested rather than for what he did, his genius seemed sure of recognition. And had he genius? There are men who bring to life so new a touch, who wake chords so novel from their own existence, that they compel belief in works they have never written, nor, perhaps, conceived. We watch them, like the buds of the hazel for the first tremulous opening of their leaves, and, when the frost nips

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## Peter Swainson

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them and they fall unopened, we watch the tree with scarcely less expectancy. Peter Swainson had given such a promise, and I find it hard to surrender my belief, even now that he is dead, and his first book,<sup>1</sup> issued probably on the day after his death, and before I knew when or how he had died or that he was dead, has passed alike unblamed and unpraised. The moment, moving swiftly, has not seen him. Will he be gathered by the gleaning years and known at last, if only for the beauty of the promise that he has not been able to fulfil?

This promise, which I shall presently discuss, was concerned with the position of nature in literature, her relative importance to the human figure as the subject-matter of art. Men who live actual lives, who know something of themselves, and are not without understanding of others,

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<sup>1</sup> *By the Roadside*, London, 1909.

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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can see in nature little but a background for themselves and the characters they create. I think that Swainson's work was made possible by his blindness to humanity, his childlike ignorance of himself. He had no foundation in the bedrock of existence, but passed his life in play. He compelled existence to masquerade before him by looking at it through a domino: through two dominoes, for he had one for town and another for the country. Early in our friendship, noticing this, and not suspecting its possible value in his equipment as a writer, I held up, perhaps as a warning, as if I felt that some untoward accident was before him, the case of Deacon Brodie. Deacon Brodie, burglar and good citizen, was just such an amateur as Swainson, and, I like to fancy, just as happy a man. Stevenson misjudges him in saying that he was "harassed below a mountain of duplicity." There was little

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## Peter Swainson

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harassment about the Deacon's elaborate deceits. I have thought, and shall continue to think, of Deacon Brodie as of an artist in life, to whom elaboration and subtlety were no trouble but a joyful savour in his nostrils. And the account of his trial<sup>1</sup> bears me out. There was no mercenary, sneaking, discreditable or disheartening motive to prompt him to his thieves' kitchens and his burglaries. Sometimes, indeed, he was out of pocket over his delicious, felonious nocturnes—and I do not believe he regretted the money. He was an unworldly artist; his vocation was clear to him, and he followed it devotedly to his martyrdom on the gallows he had himself designed. Still, admiring him as I did, I could not think him a fit model for Swainson, whose aim, as he had told me, was literature, not life.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Trial of Deacon Brodie*, edited by W. Roughead, Edinburgh, 1907.

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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Swainson's vocation had not the lurid colours of the Deacon's, but he followed it in the same disinterested manner, and it was similar in character. Like the Deacon he lived two lives, but I presently came to perceive that, whereas the Deacon found reality at least in his burglarious existence, Peter Swainson did but leave one masquerade for a second. In London he was one man, in the country another; in neither was he himself. He changed his character with his clothes, but he wore them like an actor playing alternate parts in the same theatre. In London he wore an Inverness cape with a black felt hat. In the country he wore a cap, a collarless shirt, a coloured handkerchief ingeniously tied about his throat, and the loose corduroys that he found best stood the racket of the roads. Neither of these costumes was in the least personal to the writer of his book. He was not very tall. His hair was blonde

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## Peter Swainson

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and curling, his face clearly defined, his eyes blue, and his mouth small and sharply cut.

Before describing the double life, or rather two-fold mumming, that kept him curiously child-like and free from human experience, let me set down what I know of his history. He was born in 1887, in Bradford, then a busy, ambitious town, rapidly growing into rivalry with Leeds. His birth-place was singularly inapposite. I remember telling him that his choice of it seemed an affectation. Even there, however, he had made his own world. "The first dragons I ever saw," he said once, during a discussion of mythology, "were the Leeds steam trams, blowing like whales in the dark, and blowing fire." Swainson is a Lancashire name, and suggests that eight hundred years ago his ancestors were among the Vikings who settled in Ravensglass and about the sandy

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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inlet of Morecambe Bay. His more immediate relatives were respectable middle-class people. His grandfather had made money as an ironmaster, and his father, a man of some property, was interested, not very actively, in several commercial enterprises in Bradford and Leeds. I know nothing of his childhood but a few quite worthless anecdotes that might have sketched the prelude to a very different career. They were told me by his mother, a small, lively woman, with a white forehead and very red cheeks, with whom I spent an hour or two in his London lodgings, Swainson having invited me to tea and suddenly made up his mind to go to the country. They are not worth repeating. Such anecdotes seldom are, for they are all alike. His mother died soon after he came to London, his father some years earlier. His father had evidently learnt to mistrust his son's waywardness,



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## Peter Swainson

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for, though he died rich, he did not leave Peter more money than was sufficient for the inexpensive life he chose to live. He had given him the curiously mixed education that Bradford seems to prefer. I remember angry mention of the real meaning of "a sound commercial training," and I know that Swainson had had opportunity to be more than usually idle at one of the public schools, Rugby or Winchester. He did not go to either University.

I think he was eighteen when he came to London. I met him in the winter of 1906, buying books in a shop in Chelsea. He took me to his rooms in Bramerton Street, where he had a small library and a portfolio, of which he was very proud, full of landscape drawings, Corots and imitation Corots, and many of the eccentric and fascinating sketches of the post-impressionists. He was without intimate friends, belonged to no set of young artists,

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and followed no chosen leader. He had already begun to live the singular life that gave him his happiness, his one book, and his artificial but not unbeautiful death.

He lived half his time in London, and half on the roads of France and England. He had a character for each environment. In London, among his books, he was ridiculously old. He liked old books and, as he said, felt himself old in reading them. He handled his pipe delicately, as if his fingers were rheumatic, and set both hands to his chair at rising up and at sitting down. It was laughable and, now that nothing of his is left but those essays full of wind, moonlight, and trees, seems incredible. In the country he liked to be taken for a tramp, or a gipsy, and something of a ruffian. Even in London he would talk sometimes of Romany and Shelta, the languages of gipsies and of tinkers, and of the vocabulary of cant he

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was preparing, for which many notes remain in confusion in his pocket-books. He had, too, a great collection of works on vagabondage and roguery, such as Greene's *Art of Conny-catching*, and the account written by Taylor, the water poet, of his walk across Elizabethan England. He read me with delight Sir Thomas Overbury's character of the Tinker, from whose art "was music first invented, and therefore is he allwaies furnisht with a song : to which his hammer keeping time proves that he was the first founder of the kettle drum. . . . The companion of his travels is some foule sunne-burnt Queane, that since the terrible statute recanted gipsisme, and is turned pedleresse." "Some foule sunne-burnt Queane," he repeated, when the reading was over, "some foule sunne-burnt Queane." Long afterwards, when, meeting him after he had for some time been absent, I asked

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him with whom he had been travelling, he replied joyfully, "Some foule sunne-burnt Queane." But I did not believe him, nor do I think that he knew anything of women.

These books of historical and philological knowledge of the road are no index to the point from which Peter Swainson viewed the world. They bore the same relation to his life in the country as the long dressing-gown he wore among his books bore to his fantastic old-man's life in town. They were part of his fancy dress, and he used them before a looking-glass. They would suggest that their owner was a Borrow or a Leland, interested mainly in men and words, certainly not a painter of delicate Corot-like landscapes in prose. Swainson liked people, particularly gipsies, but he gave them their parts in his play much as a child will make a pirate captain out of an innocent governess. He never

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## Peter Swainson

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let them become real to him, because he never let them call their souls their own. They were forced to cross his life like the painted cardboard figures on the stage of a toy theatre. He was *sceleris purus* and *integer vitæ*. In looking through his early note-books I found a rather charming little passage, obviously written while he was still unsure of his craftsmanship, that marks very clearly his refusal of experience.

“ On the hill I passed a man with slightly bowed legs and short gaiters, like one accustomed to the saddle. He was walking up the road by the side of a little box on wheels pulled by a donkey with crooked ears, on whose fluffy back he laid methodically, every few minutes, a perfunctory blow of the stick that he carried over his shoulder. I left them a long way behind, and it was not till late in the afternoon that they caught me up. I was sitting under a sign post at the side of the road, reading *Don Quixote* and smoking, when I heard singing and the rattle of loose wheels. Presently the little donkey trotted

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past, with its tiny box of a cart. The man was sitting on the top, one of his legs crossed beneath him, the other hanging almost to the ground. He was singing, and beating time gently on the donkey's back. They rattled down the hill before me, away into the dusk towards Montlhery, whose tall tower, four miles distant, stood out into the twilight. I heard the singing long after they were out of sight."

Borrow would not have been content to see them pass like that. He would have talked to the man, argued with him, perhaps knocked him down. He would have bought the donkey, or given it a carrot. There would have been doing and talking before the incident had seemed to be an incident at all. Swainson saw them and let them go. They had done enough for him in serving for the notation of a mood. Even so early (the note-book is dated 1905) man had ceased to be very important to him, and, in his later work, human figures are seldom more conspicuous

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## Peter Swainson

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than the fauns in Corot's silver twilights.

I print—the more readily because it is not included in his book—one of his landscapes in two sentences, that may show how slight and how merely pictorial was his use of man :

“The road, with bare trees on either side, ran beneath broad slopes of ploughed land, that curved like the edge of the world against a burning white sky. Far away on the skyline were the silhouettes of two horses and a manure cart, with two men shovelling manure.”

But his originality, his peculiar “virtue,” as Pater would have said, lay in his longer descriptions (the longest not more than half-a-dozen sparsely printed pages). He had a power of vivid painting, as, for example, in “The Fire in the Forest,” when in the circle of firelight, capriciously widening and shrinking, he saw “the tree-trunks flaring big and red with scarred detail of broken bark, and then invisible in the almost luminous blackness when the

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fire couched for a moment." But, whereas other writers have made with such a power the backgrounds to their human dramas, Swainson let nature live in her own right, and found, in wood or road or marsh or fallen tree, presences at least as individual as those in Mr. Henry James' novels. Mr. Henry James is not a fit comparison : Swainson was not analytic. Debarred, perhaps wilfully, from any real knowledge of men, it seems that with such things as these he was upon terms of unusual intimacy. He found the Kingdom of Heaven in nature, and his own heart was that of a little child. It is this, I think, that may make his only book historically significant, and himself a kind of Aloysius Bertrand<sup>1</sup> in whom some Baudelaire will find the incentive to his own more masterful power of creation. For the history of nature in literature has not been unlike her history

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<sup>1</sup> Bertrand's prose poems suggested the writing of Baudelaire's.



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in painting. Mona Lisa stands before a wonderful minute landscape ; but we do not look at it. Our eyes are for her "upon whom all the ends of the world are come." It is enough for that little landscape to know that she may see it if she turns about. We search Poussin's landscapes for his shepherds, or for Adam and Eve, unless they are already in the foreground. Claude painted skies ; but, if over the sea, then the Queen of Sheba must come down from her galley beneath them ; or, if over the land, then we must turn from them to see nymphs and satyrs dancing in a wood. Not until Corot do the nymphs move shyly as if the wood itself were somebody. But painters have made too free a use of nature not to notice her, and, even in their pictures, she is not without vitality.

In literature, nature has waited longer to find independent expression. The landscapes of Arcadia are but mosaics of Greece

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and England, stage scenery behind the princes and princesses who play a pastoral comedy. The Elizabethan poets knew that there were seasons, but only as the turning of the year affected men. In Spring were may-flower, St. Valentine's, and love. In Summer the corn grew, cuckoos called, and trees were green. In Autumn was harvest, and in Winter greasy Joan keeled the pot. The seventeenth century was concerned with heaven and hell and fancy dress, Christian's burden and the rouge and patches of Wycherley's fine ladies. The eighteenth century writers lived in town, and though the country lay at London's door, it was not mentioned in the coffee-houses. Joseph Andrews travels by road, but his most spirited landscape is Parson Trulliber's pig-stye. Humphry Clinker rides behind the coach to Bath, but sees nothing of the rolling chalk hills or of the green levels of

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Wiltshire. The Vicar of Wakefield is a country parson, but the bank of flowers upon which his daughter Olivia was painted, and the sheep, "as many as the painter could put in for nothing," that set off his daughter Sophia, make the only landscape in the book. Crabbe described nature, indeed, but she had the good taste to refuse to lend her vitality to his photographs. With the nineteenth century came the Romantics and Wordsworth, but, just as Chateaubriand's landscapes, though important, are yet keyed to the note of his love stories, so it is the poet's heart that "dances with the daffodils." They do not dance alone. I can think of no writer before Swainson who felt the possibility of surrendering his canvas to a landscape, and was so reticent of his own presence, so determined in keeping others off the ground that he had perceived to be alive. It is as if he had carelessly begun

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to cut his name in the bark of an oak, and seen the red drops of the dryad's blood fall, tremulous, from the wound. He staunched it with his handkerchief and would let no other vandals near the tree. Perhaps such a man as Swainson was needed, who made men unreal, and was very uncertain of his own reality, to feel the more delicate reality of nature, and to perceive the possibility of subtle landscapes in prose, pure of the officious presence of an obvious human interest.

It may be that, like many innovators, he was ignorant of his own discovery. There are human figures in *By the Roadside* that a consciousness of aim, a pride of novelty, would probably have banished. Several of the chapters in that heterogeneous little book (whose uncertainty of effort may cost it its eternity) are portraits, some even containing incidents. But the portraits are very

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mannered. Their subjects have abdicated in favour of the painter, and, whenever the abdication has been half-hearted, whenever he has been compelled to an unwilling realism, the portraits lack vitality. They are like the bad work of an original artist who copies an older style. Far more vital are those chapters in which there are no people, but only Swainson's tender vision of landscape. These, like "The Wood at Beaugency," "Twilight in Sherwood," and "The Sleeping Town," are full of a tremulous activity. An invisible wind seems to stir the frail and frozen branches of rowan and birch. The thing is motionless, the sentences models of placidity, yet the picture seems a-shiver like the sunlight in a Pissarro. The last, particularly, shows Swainson at his best. It is a description of a little country town at midnight. The feeling of it is not unlike that of the passage in "Aucassin et Nicolette," where

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the girl slips through the moonlit streets of Beaucaire : “ Ele vint au postis, si le deffrena, si s’en isci parmi les rues de Biau-caire, per devers l’ombre, car la lune luisoit molt clere. . . . ” “ She came to the postern gate, and opened it, and went through the streets of Beaucaire, keeping to the shadow, for the moon shone very bright. . . . ” There is a sense of escape, of delicate footing. The first personal pronoun is never used, nor is it made clear who sees the town that is described. It might be written by a wild faun, fearful and adventurous, noting the weathercock against the sky, the patterns of the stars cut by the roofs, the blind windows, the glittering white of the narrow empty streets. The impression of the town is at once too powerful and too delicate to be felt by a man. Indeed, even my imagination of a faun is impertinent, for the essay seems to owe its whole life to the little silent

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town sleeping in the June night. It is an inhuman and beautiful thing.

But Swainson died too soon to keep his promise, whether or not he was conscious of making it. He had gone so far in discovering in inanimate things the reality that was denied himself by the two masks that alternately delighted him, when, in one of these masks, he died. His birth was not in keeping with his character, but his death, melancholy as it was, shared the theatrical nature of his life. It was almost as if he played at dying. It was his habit to leave behind the old man of the book-room in Bramerton Street, and to walk the roads of France and England in the vigour of his boyhood, collecting, or pretending to collect, the materials for his Dictionary of Cant, talking with the coloured phantoms he made from the raw stuff of tramps and carters, sleeping in inns or at the roadside, and, I suppose,

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sometimes alone to let himself feel, delicately (he told me once he was afraid of it), the personality he found in empty places. His father and mother had died young: there may have been some taint in the blood that did not show in the child-like bloom of his face. He was walking in the North of England, on the moorland between Lancaster and Ulverston. After passing the proofs of his book, he had disappeared, to escape, perhaps, the celebrity that its publication did not bring him. He had suffered from a cough, and died suddenly, a day, or perhaps two days, after his book was issued. The two gipsies who were with him did not know his name, and I had difficulty in finding them. Even in dying he did not for a moment lay aside the part that he was playing. "He would have his way and talk Romany to us," the men said, "though we answered him in English."



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His last words were in that language.  
“Kushto bak, pal,” he said, which means  
“Good luck, brother,” and “Kushto rati,”  
which is “Good-night.”



Rolf Sigurdson

TO MISS DORA COLLINGWOOD.

1904



# Rolf Sigurdson

## PROLOGUE

**I**N a hollow in the side of a hill a fire of logs was burning, sending smoke and flames to meet the clouds, and in the fire-light round the blaze sat three men talking ; and a fourth lay a little way off, but he said nothing. The sun had died in the bosom of the sea, and the moon shone fitfully through fleeting banks of cloud. The men were rough and strong, with loose hair. One was sharpening two stones together, another shaped an axe-shaft of wood, the third plaited a baldrick of rushes, but the fourth lay idle, listening to the others talking.

The men were telling of their dreams and the meanings they had invented for themselves, or had had made for them by the wise woman, Thorgerd, who knew all

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the figures and music and places of dreams, and what all meant to the dreamer. In those days it was held almost a disgrace to be no dreamer, and dreams were found useful in the interpretation of life and in the foretelling of the future. Thorgerd's hut was far over the moor, near the place where the waters of the land meet the waters of the sea, rushing to mingle with each other in a narrow place with rocks. Thorgerd loved the wailing of the sea, and sat continually by her fire, listening to the crackling logs and the moaning of the waters, while she made dreams for others, and told them what they meant. One day the waters burst from their passage and Thorgerd was carried away in the swirl of escaping waves ; but that was after this time.

The man sharpening stones was speaking. " Last night I dreamed of a fight in the air, a dragon and a winged serpent,

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battling together in the air above my head. It seemed to me that they were red and wet with blood, and, as the fight thickened, the blood splashed very cold upon my face, and I awoke, and they were gone. What meaning will Thorgerd give me, do you men think? "

"Ah," said the second, "two fighting things are a sign of battle, but the blood that fell on your face is the blood of your foe, so Thorgerd told me, when I dreamed of the struggling ptarmigans in the low hut by the shore. You will fight, and your enemy will die."

"That is good," said the man with the stones.

He whose fingers were busy with the baldrick spoke also: "I too dreamed three nights ago, and I saw an osprey swoop and lift a golden fish out of the sea. An eagle with silver wings snatched it from the beak of the osprey. Yes, and a second eagle

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fought with the first for the fish, and they fought over the sea, and both fell deep-wounded into the waves and were drowned."

"That surely means that you will be robbed, and that your robbers will do your own vengeance for you by slaying each other like fools," said the first. "But let Rolf there tell us his dreams. Hi! there idle one, come into the heat of the fire, and tell your dreams as we have told ours. Come up here and tell us."

"Yes," said the third man, who was intent upon fitting two bright buckles, from some rich country in the south, to his now completed baldrick, twining the ends of the rushes through holes in the beaten metal. "Yes, let Rolf tell us what he dreams when he is not thinking of that Thorhalla of his that he is going to marry."

Rolf threw a pebble at him, and answered half angrily, without getting up. "I have no dreams, and that you know; I see in



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my sleep only clutching hands, and heads without motion, and faces without life, and coloured sparks that have no meaning; I cannot dream. I sleep like a beast or a bird, seeing nothing or only meaningless things.

“Thorgerd says that it is ill with those who cannot dream, and that they should envy even coward fighters, for they at least leave the world and live when they die, while those who cannot dream can never leave the world, but live here till they die, and then flash out like falling stars and are no more.”

“Thorgerd says that those who cannot dream are like wolves, hungry and unsatisfied, crying in the night for the things they cannot possess.”

“Thorgerd says that there is but one way for those who cannot dream; they are given once to choose if they will dream or no, and if they choose to dream like other

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men, they lose their manhood, through doing what was not willed for them, and learn the love of dreams, and lose all else, skill in hunting, in song, in battle. She says that those who cannot dream by nature must live only in one world, and must choose which world, the world of dreams, or the world of warm blood."

"Thorgerd is an old fool. I am not troubled with dreams," said Rolf, and lay angry, because he was not.

"Tell us a story, one of you two, if Rolf has no dream for us. Tell us of Gudrun and the single kiss; tell us of Baldr; tell us how Odin sent the children of the winds to run on earth as wolves. Tell us a tale, one of you two," said the man who was busy with the buckles and the baldrick.

The first of the two men laid aside the stones he was shaping, and stirred the fire with a brand that was sticking out of it.

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Then he told how Odin quarrelled with the winds, because they blew the hair into his eyes as he was stepping down the rainbow.

When he reached the point where Odin cursed the winds, and the winds replied in the song of rebellion that still they sometimes use, Rolf, who had been lying angry, scarcely hearing the story, but wondering why he could not dream like the others, thinking himself less than they in consequence, rose and slipped off, climbing the side of the hollow, twisting himself over its rim by a sturdy clump of heather that hung down and gave him a hold for his hands. He walked away towards the crest of the moor, shaking his arms to the wind, shouting sometimes in the face of the gale as it whirled round the side of the hill. With his hair free, and his limbs loose and easy, he swung up the moor with long strides, to go down into

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the far valley by the river, and visit Thorgerd, and see what she would say to him.

Down in the hollow, the story-teller finished his tale: "And Odin swore to the winds, with the great curse, 'Your children shall run on the earth as wolves, they shall howl in the darkness the sorrow of the powerless; never again shall they sport on the rainbow, or caress the hair of the Valkyries riding in the storms;—men shall hate them, and slay them, till all are destroyed.'" Then he was silent, and watched the other man finish fitting the buckles to the baldrick, and slip it over his shoulders.

The baldrick was perfect in evenness of plaiting, and the buckles, of a material that the north scarcely knew, shone wonderfully in the firelight. It slipped too far over the man's shoulders, and, for one moment, fastened his elbows to his

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side. Before he could struggle out of it, the story-teller, who liked the look of the baldrick, picked up one of his stones and struck him hard with it on the forehead, so that he died. Then he pulled off the baldrick and hung it about his own neck, showing it to the third man, who was shaping the axe-shaft.

"We share it of course," he answered.

"I killed him for it : it is mine," replied the story-teller, fingering its buckles.

"There are two of the bright things. Give me one."

"I tell you, it is mine, and I want both bright things. See them glint in the fire."

The other leapt across the burning logs, and hit him angrily with the blunt axe-shaft, so that blood poured through his hair. He fought too, with the stone, and both were good fighters. They grappled, and slipped, and fell in the flames, so that the fire was knocked to pieces, and, as neither

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would loose his hold, both were killed, So were the dreams of all three friends fulfilled, the first and second who had dreamed of battle and the blood of their enemies, the third who had imagined robbers with the death of both of them. And Rolf, striding towards the long ridge of the moor, stopped a moment on the top of the hill, whence he could see into the hollow, and saw the fire scattered about, and knew that they had been fighting, but neither knew or cared what had happened to any of them. In those days friends soon fought, and, the death of one was no great sorrow, if it was but a good fight.

Rolf turned and left the high moors now, and walked down over the heather, with pinewoods below him in the darkness, and heathland stretching to the sea. A wolf howled not far away, and seemed to follow him. "Child of the wind," shouted Rolf in the dark, "are you and

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I not alike, wanting that we have not. For you have lost what once you had, and I cannot dream." He strode away in the night to the hut of Thorgerd, the wise woman, who knew the secrets of dreaming.

Thorgerd sat, warming her hands at the fire, in the middle of her hut. She looked up when Rolf entered, but said nothing, and continued stretching her thin fingers before the flames, that he might tell her why he came. Some were frightened of Thorgerd, with her knowledge of strange things, but Rolf feared few, and Thorgerd was not of that few. He flung himself on the ground beside the fire, holding his chin in his hands.

"Thorgerd," he said, "there is something lacking in me. I am not like the rest. I cannot dream. Tell me how I may dream, and see the future in my sleep, like other men?"

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Thorgerd said nothing to him, but looked at him curiously. She liked this Rolf, though he was not of those who kept her alive in return for her interpretations of their dreams.

"I will build up the wall of your hut that lets in the sleet," said Rolf after a little, thinking that the wise woman wanted a fee.

"Nay, my son, do what you like for me, if you can get joy in the doing. It was not for that I was waiting. Have you never dreamed since you remember?"

"Never. I do but see fragments of meaningless things, and that is no dream."

For a long time Thorgerd watched him, warming her hands at the flames. At last she spoke. "You shall dream this one night, she said, and in the morning you shall choose whether or no you will dream again. Are you willing?"



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"I am ready to do anything to become as other men."

"Nay, but it is not unlikely that what you will see this night will cure you of your wish to dream, for you shall see the fate of those who, not being dreamers, intrude themselves without right into the life of dreams, and are then found to lose the life of the world."

"None the less I am ready."

### THE DREAM OF ROLF SIGURDSON

In the firelight and the dark, Rolf, lying on the floor, saw the hands of Thorgerd moving in a rhythmic motion, and heard her singing a monotonous low song. The room swam black and red before his eyes, and against the weird colouring moved Thorgerd's shrunken hands, seeming to entice himself out of himself. At last he felt that he was floating, free and untrammelled in the air of the room,

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watching himself lying on the ground, listening to the crooning of Thorgerd. He heard a voice speak, and knew it was his own voice, asking : " So I must sleep with strange things, beautiful and intangible? Where shall I find the strange things that will be about me sleeping? For I would dream, and you say that they will teach me."

He heard Thorgerd answering : " You must travel far, and under the tree Iggdrasil, whose branches cross the sunset and the sunrise, and on whose boughs sit the two silver owls, and the eagle of contemplation, with the hawk perched on its forehead, above its beak, watching the little harts that run in the branches, plucking the buds of the tree.

" There you will dream, and thence wander to the hall of dream-making, and there you will be shown such things as you will not be able to leave. You will return no

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longer as you are, but different, for you will not be able to put your dreams from you. Is it worth this to dream?"

Rolf heard the man, who was himself, answering: "It is worth more than this. How shall I find the tree?"

Then again came the voice of Thorgerd, and he saw her look into the dying flames and then again at the man on the floor, that was himself.

"You must build a boat of ash throughout, and set a sail in it, and be guided by the wind, and not seek to alter the course, and you will come by sea and land to the tree Iggdrasil, which is, as I told you, with birds and beasts in its branches, and there you will learn more."

The man—that Rolf knew was himself—thanked her, and passed quickly and quietly out of the hut and away to the woods by the shore, and there built him a boat of ash throughout, and slew a wolf and made

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a sail of his skin, and never slept till the work was done. Then he ran the boat down the beach and leapt into it as it lifted on the waves, and it rode the water well. He set the sail and rested in the stern, and fell asleep. The wind caught the sail and carried the boat fast over the water, leaving scarcely a ripple on either side.

It was eventime when he set sail, and, as the boat passed out of sight of land, with him sleeping in it, a bird, white, with black head and wings, flew over the sea out of the sunset and followed the boat and lighted on the gunwale. It stood there by the sleeping man, silent a long time. Rolf knew that these things were happening to him, but he was not in any way surprised, except at the skill with which he had fashioned the boat and the sail, and the ease with which he had launched it without help.

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## Rolf Sigurdson

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A day passed, and the bird spoke to him as he slept in the boat :

“ Rolf Sigurdson, what see you ? ”

And the man, sleeping, answered : “ I see nothing but blackness,” and the bird placed its head beneath its wing and they two slept another day. Again the bird asked : “ Rolf Sigurdson, what see you ? ”

The man answered from his sleep : “ I see a grey cloud and no more.” Another day they slept. The bird spoke once again.

“ What do you see, Rolf Sigurdson ? ”

The man answered sleeping : “ I see a rose sky, and on it the shadow of a tree with spreading branches.” And the bird slept no more, but flew to the prow of the boat, and stayed there, peering forward along its beak.

Another day passed, and Rolf saw the man wake up and stare about him, for the boat was speeding fast and silent between

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tall cliffs, black and high of crest, dropping down into the water. The boat slipped on until they came to a short space of shingle, and a gap between two cliffs, on one side of the inlet. The boat ran itself ashore and a little way up the shingle, and Rolf saw himself step out and walk through the gully between the cliffs with the bird perched on his shoulder.

For two days he walked, and on the morning of the third day saw against the sunrise the dim shadow of a huge tree, and it had three roots, gnarled and mighty, binding it to the ground, and small harts ran in its branches, plucking buds, and an eagle was perched there with a hawk upon its beak, and two silver owls sat aloft in the tree, and made a melancholy sound. Rolf saw the man, with the bird upon his shoulder, walk round the tree to see it against the rosy sunset, as in his half-vision on the boat. Then he came up to

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it again, and listened at its roots. Under the first he heard the sounds of hell, and beneath the second the crackling of the frost-giants, and under the third the clashing tankards of the rejoicing gods. And he lay down between the root of the giants and the root of hell.

The harts descended from the tree and made him a pillow of their warm fur, and the eagle with the hawk stood at his head, and the pale owls perched on his feet, crooning their desolate tune. The bird that accompanied him stood by him, and, when he had fallen asleep, asked him what he saw.

“I see a tall gateway, with none guarding it, and I hear a voice speaking, but I do not hear the words.”

“Turn back from that gate, for it is the hall of dream-making, and mark the road of your returning, for we must find it again.”

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Rolf spoke again, "I left the gateway, and a sound of soft music was within it, and I passed through between high rocks, whose brows rested on each other, and, coming out on the beach, I found the boat we left before coming hither."

For a night he seemed to sleep under the great tree, and from time to time there was murmuring of strange songs, but Rolf did not know whether they were sung by himself or no. And once, he seemed to catch the flickering shadows of a waning fire, and to see Thorgerd, the wise woman, moving in the shadows. Then he came back to his dream, and saw himself waking under the tree Iggdrasil, with the eagle and the hawk, the harts, the little owls and the strange bird.

He rose and walked away with the bird on his shoulder. He looked back once at the tree, and the harts were again running in its branches, and the birds were again



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perched in its boughs, and all that day the sad music of the wailing owls followed him as he walked.

In the evening he came near the shore, and saw not far off two cliffs, leaning on each other. He turned aside and passed through them, until he came to a noble gateway in the rock, of enormous height. The bird alighted on the threshold, but Rolf knew that he passed in, and walked through long stately passages, following the sound of a low music, that seemed always just before him. At last the music was all about him, and he came into a lofty hall, the hall built by the gods for the maidens who make dreams. There was a fire of pale flames in the middle of the hall, which cast strange uncouth shadows that pursued each other and vanished on the walls or ceiling. The dream-making maidens sat all round the hall, weaving dreams of coloured silk

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Rolf knew that he stood wondering, ashamed of he knew not what. As the maidens let their white hands move in the fashioning of dreams, they sang, with their eyes on their work, that low song that all who dream have heard. Those who hear it feel that it is easy to slip for ever from the world and spend the rest of time in hearing its faint music.

Rolf heard it, as he stood there in the hall with the maidens, his hands spread out before him. He listened for the crackling of the fire, but it made no sound. Then all his life was caught up into the beauty of the music, and its beauty made him weep, and faint, and he would have fallen, but something stayed him that he did not see. After he had long stood there wavering, pained by the loveliness of their song, six of the dream maidens led him out amongst them, so that it seemed to him that they had enveloped him in

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their music, as in a net, and were taking him where they wished. Through the gateway they passed, and through the rocks, till they came to the boat that lay upon the strand.

The bird rose from the threshold as they came out and flew before them and perched on the bow of the boat. It rose when Rolf came with the maidens, and flew high into the air, with a mournful noise, and then circled about them until the boat slipped off into the water, when it flew above the bows out towards the sea.

Rolf lay in the stern of the boat, and slept while the maidens sat on either side of the boat with the water on their pale feet lapping. And all the while they wove the coloured silks, and sang continually. Words of their song came to Rolf in his sleep, and they were such as these :—

“Men will cast him out, and seek to slay him, for has he not deserted their life

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for ours ; but he shall not be slain. No ; for years upon years he shall live in the thralldom of dreams. He will cast himself on the ground and ask to die, for the world will be a sorrow to him, because he has left it ; but he shall live in torment for the love of dreams. Dreams he shall have ; yes, dreams ; we will weave dreams for him, sisters, dreams as beautiful as ourselves ; dreams he shall have more beautiful than men can behold without anguish. For when he was free, he gave himself into our hands, and he shall dream dreams within dreams until the world cools."

The boat moved swiftly out from the cliffs and over the sea, with Rolf sleeping in the stern, and the maidens on either side. It flew fast over the waters. There was a moon. The boat reached the land, and ran up, grounding on the beach. Thorhalla, his betrothed, was waiting

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timorous upon the shore, for he had gone a long time, and she had thought him dead. He stepped out dazed, and she met him and caressed him. But his heart was heavy with the music he had heard, and the song.

He turned and beckoned to the maidens, and found them beside him, but Thorhalla said, "To whom do you beckon, for there is no one there?" So that he knew that she could not see them.

In his sorrow at learning this, that there could be no true comradeship between them, he left Thorhalla, and wandered alone on the hills. The dream maidens were with him, singing to him till he felt that he could die gladly, so full was his heart with the sorrow and the beauty of their singing. And he came down from the hills to marry Thorhalla, thinking so to escape from his dream. They were married, and he took her home, but a

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weariness was upon him, and he could not speak, and the touch of her that had once gladdened him with a laughing joy, left him sad ; and for this reason Thorhalla, too, was sorry for their wedding.

And, in his dream, Rolf saw that on their wedding night, as they two lay sleeping, the dream maidens came into the room and wove an intricate, sad dream for him ; and he dreamed that he had passed away with them across the sea to the land where dreams and nothing else are true ; and he awoke, and left Thorhalla sleeping, and passed away with them to the boat, and did not turn back. He saw himself sleeping in the boat, and heard the dream maidens sing as the boat fled over the waves.

Then he saw that Thorhalla returned to her father, and that he was very wroth, for it was an evil thing to leave a wife new-married, and outlawry was its punishment.

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He saw that the father of Thorhalla sent out messengers in boats, north and south, east and west, to bring tidings of Rolf, that he might avenge Thorhalla ; and these messengers were to return on the evening of the second day, and Thorhalla's father was to meet them in his boat.

Then he saw the sun sinking, and a boat leave the land and wait out to sea ; and the four boats with the four messengers came up to it from the distances all ways. And he saw the man from the north stand in his boat and cry, "I have seen Rolf Sigurdson under the North Star." The man from the south shouted aloud, "I have seen him in the south." And he who had gone east cried, "I have seen Rolf Sigurdson against the dawn." And the man from the west shouted, "I have seen Rolf Sigurdson chasing the sunset." So none knew where he went ; but Rolf knew that the man that was himself had gone

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to tend for ever that pale fire where the maidens sit around the hall weaving their dreams of coloured silk.

### EPILOGUE

And then, out of the clamour and noise, he heard the voice of Thorgerd speaking, and he knew that fingers were laid upon his eyes. The hands were taken away, and he awoke, and saw Thorgerd looking at him, and heard the crackling of the fire, on which she had lately put fresh wood, and felt that a weight had been taken from him, and rejoiced that he had left his dream, and that he had not lost Thorhalla nor the joy of hunting beasts and killing his fellows. And he laughed aloud when Thorgerd asked him :

“ Well, and have you dreamed enough, or will you dream again ? ”

“ I have dreamed such a dream,” he replied, “ as will last my life, and it is good



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to be alive after it. I dreamed—but I cannot tell you what I dreamed. It is enough that I will not let my dream come true, for I am glad to be alive.”

Thorgerd laughed quietly to herself, and gave him milk out of a wooden bowl and some shreds of meat ; and then the dawn was come and there was a fine light in the sky, and he stood outside the hut and listened to the waters, and shook his hair and laughed loud for the joy of living. He ran down the beach and out into the waves to his waist, and swam out further in the morning sunlight, so that he felt the water lapping cool and fresh about his throat and shoulders as he pulled himself through the waves. He swam for some time and then floated, delighting in the life that he had dreamed was gone from him for ever. He floated in the sunlight and watched it playing with the waters over his white limbs. Then he remembered

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Thorhalla, and swam inshore, and walked over the moors to see her. On his way he passed the hollow in the hill where he had left his friends the night before, and he found them lying dead, with the baldrick around the neck of one of them. The baldrick had been spoilt by the fire, but he took the buckles and carried them off for a present to Thorhalla.

*Chelsea, 1904.*

# The Little Silver Snakes

TO MISS BARBARA COLLINGWOOD

1905



## The Little Silver Snakes

THERE are among us people who go to and fro about their business, people whom their friends do not imprison in asylums, who yet hide almost from themselves small secret madnesses, that they keep under the control of their own sanity and determination. They know that on one subject they must not speak for fear of betraying themselves. They know that there is a kink among their thought-chains that others must not see. The fact that they understand that it is a kink, a bubbled pane in the glass through which they look upon the world, differentiates them from the hallucinated, into whom they often develope. These are certain that they see right and that mankind see wrong, but those of whom I write know well that their sight is crooked.

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They are mad not the less, but, knowing their madness, are able to conceal it. There have been many such cases, and one of the most interesting was that of Keith Quinton, the painter. Reverenced by all who knew his pictures, and known by name to thousands who had never seen his work, that man, whom many a struggling artist would have envied as the happiest man alive, carried in him till his thirtieth year the secret of his own insanity.

How and when the disease had originated in him he never knew. It is more than probable that such things are born in us and lie torpid like toads in rocks till some suitable incident brings them to light.

Quinton traced his first knowledge of his malady to the day when, a lad on his holidays, he had leaned before a huge glass case in the Reptile House of the Zoological Gardens, to watch two bloated puff

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adders, short, thick, and deadly, move behind the glass panes. He had leaned over the railings before the case, with a brightly-coloured school cap in his hand, that rested close against the bottom of the glass. For the first time he felt that strange thrill pass through him, which he knew so well in later years, as he watched a short, squat adder curled like an S within a foot of his hand. He had looked into its hard, dull eyes. He had watched its short, apparently immovable length. And then, suddenly a pink wide mouth, with curved and visible fangs, had struck the glass before his hand. He had snatched the cap away, faint and sick, and seen the yellow moisture on the glass as the baffled snake, darting out its black tongue, left the place and slid angrily over the floor of its prison.

He felt sure that it was from that moment that the madness had seized him. He

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never spoke of it to his parents or to other boys, but lived alone with a recurrent thought of some undefined relation between himself and those coloured creeping deaths that have been cursed since the beginning of the world. He was frightened, because he could not explain a curious poignant pleasure that he got from fastening his mind on some small detail, even a sentence in a book, that was remotely connected with the subject of his fantasy. He was also frightened because, young as he was then, he had already realised that he could never tell to others the thing that was so real to himself. He knew, even then, the absolute loneliness of human beings. There are some who chatter through their lives, imagining that they are confidential, and believing that others confide in them, but there are none, except, perhaps, those who are in love, who are not isolated in reality. Two friends may spend all their lives in



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fellowship, and yet never for a moment can they pierce the veil that hangs between them. The boy had already that sensibility of nerves and accuracy of perception which, trained to other uses, won him later his success. He felt with torturing acuteness this fact of his own loneliness. When he was fifteen he knew that he was mad, knew also that he was sane, knowing his madness, knew that he could not speak to others of his secret, and that, if he did, they would either disbelieve him or tear away from him his sanity.

For sane the boy was, and not unhealthy. If he was lazy at work, his pencil was restlessly employed. He did badly at school, but wonderfully well, when he passed at eighteen from school to studio, from the study of books to the study of lines.

But during these three years the madness had strengthened its hold upon him.

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When he came to London for his holidays, he would make a pilgrimage to the Zoological Gardens and force himself to go an unseeing round of monkeys, lions and tigers, leopards, elephants, deer and parrots, in order to augment by delay the insane pleasure of self-torture in the snake house. It seemed to him that his knees trembled together as he approached the door of the place, and he was surprised that others did not seem to notice it. He would breathe fast, and he had to force his hands into his pockets to hide their convulsive movements. Then he would gaze at the green mambas, the wormlike rock adders, the puff adders, the cobras, the mocassins, choosing always the venomous species. He could watch a python or a boa constrictor without emotion, but the mere sight of the tiny deadly patterned snakes choked him with an insane pleasure, as a man is choked by love. He would

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watch them for delirious minutes, and tear himself away with dazed eyes and hot forehead. He would go home, outside an omnibus, and wonder vaguely how the 'bus conductor could collect his fare without noticing and commenting on his extraordinary condition.

His father died when he was seventeen, and the madness became a religion, when he found, in going through the books in the library, a flat black box with a key in it. Inside was a small slim book, bound in green leather with gold tooling upon it. It was an old book in Eastern characters. It had been taken to pieces and rebound, interleaved with white parchment, on which an English translation had been made in beautifully illuminated letters. On the flyleaf he found his father's name in his father's writing, and was filled with an ecstasy of wrath with that loneliness that keeps mind from mind.

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Perhaps his father also had shared his malady. Perhaps he had lost in his father the only chance he would ever have of letting other shoulders bear a little of the burden of his secret. He read the green book with a candle by his bedside, and it added fuel to the madness that already burned in him with a steady flame. It was a book of the ritual of some sect of Oriental snake-worshippers. It was full of all manner of ceremonial, voluptuously grotesque, and he rose in the night to make the signs and movements of the body that it commanded. He read and re-read it, and at last could make himself ill with anticipation of pleasure, by merely looking at its smooth green back, marked in gold with a glittering sinuosity of serpents.

He was mad, and yet he grew up studying his art in London and Paris, seeking spasmodically, by throwing his whole energy into his work, to escape from

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the madness that accompanied him. Perhaps he might have freed himself, if only he could have destroyed the green book. Twice he held it before the fire, ready to drop it in the flames. Each time he was prevented by the idea of some terrible fantastic vengeance that would come upon him if he attempted to do away with the sacred volume. He felt as if he had contemplated sacrilege, and carefully replaced the book in its box, and practised its curious rites with greater vehemence than before, as if in penance for his intention.

Through all these years he let no one suspect what a double fire was consuming his life. His friends in the Quartier Latin, and in the Chelsea studios, believed that he was wholly devoted to art, madly devoted, they said, as they always say of anyone who is able to work harder than themselves.

Once only did he even come near dis-

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closure, or discovery. At a country garden party, he had left the tennis grounds with Jacquotte Perm  , and was walking along a narrow mossy path at the edge of a miniature wood, when, right under his feet, a large snake slipped out of the way. Jacquotte darted forward to look at it, and turning up her face from the shrub under which it had disappeared, called to him to catch or kill it. Quinton stood there absolutely rigid, with his face working furiously. Then he fainted. Jacquotte cried out, and other guests came down the path. Fortunately among them was one of those meddlesome people who know everything. She busied herself with pleasurable importance in telling them all at the top of her voice, that it was a sun-stroke. She knew the symptoms, she declared, and, when Quinton recovered consciousness, he did not contradict her.

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He felt that day an immense longing to share things with Jacquotte. Her insensibility to the horror of the snake, her neat little brain, the whole difference between himself and her attracted him. He knew that he would never be able to tell her the truth about himself, but he believed that he would find it possible to become so absorbed in her, as to destroy by neglect the madness that was in him. The idea appeared the more feasible, as Jacquotte was clearly interested in him, was always ready to talk and walk with him, liked his pictures, or at any rate said so, told him she was ambitious for him, and in many ways made him feel that he was important to her. She had a neat little body, firm and active, just like her brain, and she had a clear cut face and blonde hair. He liked these things.

With a great effort of will he forced his madness to the back of his head, proposed

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marriage, and was accepted by Jacquotte, after a careful hesitation that fanned his inclination into ardour. Jacquotte was partly French and partly English. French in her idea of a husband as a useful appendage, English in experiencing before her marriage free intercourse with men. Her mother had been an Englishwoman, her father a Frenchman. She was rather fond of Quinton, proud to be the wife of a famous man, and quite decently interested in marriage. Quinton was now twenty-nine and celebrated, tall, dark and rather thin. He would make, she thought, a very handsome husband.

She had made him really in love with her during the six months between their engagement and marriage, and he persuaded himself that at last he had really found an escape from the fancies that had so long been a part of him. They took a year's honeymoon, at Fiesole, where



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Quinton painted one of his most famous pictures, at Naples, in Rome, spending the last three months in Paris.

By the time they reached Paris, Quinton was sure that in marrying Jacquotte he had escaped his malady. For nearly a year he had been free from the old ideas. The green book, though he had not dared to leave it behind, lay undisturbed at the bottom of his box, as the old mania lay at the bottom of his brain, as he thought, dead for ever.

Jacquotte and he rummaged through Paris together, buying this and that for the furnishing of the house and studio, that were being re-papered and painted to be ready for their return. Observing himself closely he saw only one symptom of the disease that had survived, and that was his choice for green. Jacquotte objected to green, and with half a fear he watched himself one day insisting that he

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should be allowed at least a room, or a recess in a room, furnished and papered in his favourite colour. Jacquotte saw that he was in earnest and gave in prettily.

“Of course it shall,” she said; “it shall have a little green temple all to itself if it likes—that is, if it is very nice to me.”

Quinton was suddenly quiet.

Another day he had spent all the afternoon in the Luxembourg Gardens, watching some children playing, perhaps the very children who appear in his charming composition of babies playing with kites. When he came in, Jacquotte seized hold of him, and took him off to show him a wonderful green tapestry that had unfortunately been very expensive, but was so nice that she was sure he would be delighted to have it to hang round that alcove he was so set on possessing.

She unrolled it before him on the floor, looking up at him over its edge. It was a

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dull Japanese green, with a repeated pattern of twining snakes around its borders.

“What is the matter?” she asked.

“Nothing. I am a little cold. One forgets how cold it is here in November, watching those children run about.”

These incidents, and others like them, showed him that he was not so far out of the power of his mania as he had fancied. More than once he found himself guiltily fondling the old contortions in his mind—the old grotesque and horrible fancies that had ruled his life.

And then, wandering together through the small streets in Montmartre, they came one day on a low-browed curiosity shop, much like others of its kind, full of Eastern trinkets, little smooth brown gods from China, bronzes from India, tiny effigies from Egypt, the inevitable clay figures of Tanagra, plaster-of-paris miniatures of the Venus of Milo and the Winged Victory of

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Samothrace, dusty blue and white pottery, dusty pottery with flowers painted on it in mellowed pinks and greens, old cabinets veneered and carved, small fantastic tables, and candlesticks in brass, pewter, and silver. There were some pewter drinking flagons that Jacquotte coveted. They would be so charming for the little intimate parties of interesting people that she had promised herself on their return to Chelsea.

They went in together, and while Jacquotte, small, hard, insistent, and inquiring, was making her bargain with the proprietor, Quinton prowled in the dusty room, examining now a tiny bronze, and now a clay figurine of delicate shape. He had almost decided to purchase a little charm cut in Australian malachite, when he saw some silver work that made him drop it hastily and lean over a table. On a shelf at the other side, among some

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candlesticks, was a small thing in silver that brought back with a sudden shock the whole strength of his malady. He did not attempt to resist its fascination. On a plain square base were two silver snakes coiled separately, partly raising their bodies so that their necks intertwined. The two heads faced upwards, and the mouths were wide open, the fangs showing, and the tongues, delicately moulded in the silver, drawn back between the jaws. The whole thing stood about eight inches high.

Quinton could not take his eyes off it. It brought back to him with a clear-cut intensity those long sleepless nights with the candle and the green book that held the secret of his life and that of his father. He saw before him, in a hallucination stronger than the vision of memory, a diagram from the book. It represented the "twin snakes of this world," and he knew that the silver-work in front of him

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was an image of the sacred things. Their mouths, turned upwards, and wide open, were for the burning of incense. He leant over the table. Yes, on the necks of the snakes were patches worn smooth in the metal, where worshippers had stroked the sacred necks with quivering fingers.

“It would make a famous pen-rack to go on Monsieur’s writing-table,” said the voice of the dealer beside him.

Jacquotte stood, impatient, waiting for him to take the flagons with which her arms were laden.

“How much?” asked Quinton, well knowing that he would pay the price, however exorbitant it might be.

The dealer had no means of knowing how badly his customer wanted the snakes. He named a safe price. “Two hundred francs,” he said.

Jacquotte was accustomed to manage all such matters for her husband, who was

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quite ready on every occasion to pay the sum first asked. She broke in :

“ Monsieur will give you 150 francs.”

“ But 150 francs ! That is not a half what they are worth. I could not sell them for less than 175.”

Quinton paid for them and the flagons, knowing that for 175 francs he had bought himself back into the slavery of his disease.

“ Whatever did you want them for ? ” said his wife, as they waited on the pavement for a fiacre.

“ They are pretty things,” he said, trying to suppress the exultation in his voice.

From that day he worried her continually to be back in England. Ideas were in his head that he must paint with the bloom of their freshness upon them. There were their friends to be considered. London was pleasanter than Paris in the winter time. In short, he exhausted every

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possible excuse for putting an end to their honeymoon, and had the satisfaction of getting Jacquotte to town within a fortnight of the New Year.

They were to live in his own house in Chelsea, and it had been overhauled and made ready to receive them. The morning after they arrived he went out to arrange about the fitting up of the green alcove. He visited carpenters and builders, and bought a large lounge-chair in green leather from a shop in the Tottenham Court Road.

On the following day the painters and paperers arrived, bringing ladders, dirty boots, and an unpleasing smell into the house.

Jacquotte found them in the hall, just after they had been admitted.

"There must be a mistake," she said, "the house is already finished."

The men explained, fingering their caps,



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that Mr. Quinton had ordered them. They produced green paper and green paint.

Quinton came running down the stairs from his painting room.

“Oh, that’s all right,” he said. “Will you come upstairs?”

The men followed him, but Jacquotte turned angrily away.

Afterwards there was a quarrel. She could not believe that he was in earnest about disfiguring a bit of his study. He told her that he was, but could not tell her why. She laughed at him. He retorted bitterly that it was his own house, and she replied with equal bitterness that she wished it was not also hers.

The quarrel was patched up, as such things are, and Jacquotte was satisfied. Quinton remained unhappy. He foresaw that his life was to become a continual struggle to keep his secret hidden from his

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wife. He was more certain than ever that he could not tell her, and he realised with impotent intensity that the mania would be strengthened a hundredfold by his indulgence of it. He had lost all wish to fight against it. The desire for the green room, with the twin snakes, and the book of snake-worship was as strong with him as the cravings of an opium smoker.

In four days the alcove in his study was completed. It was nine feet square, with green walls. Where it opened into the room was a carved wood partition, with a row of small pillars in black along the ceiling, and tall thin pillars at either side of the mouth of the recess. A curtain of rich green velvet hung across the opening. It ran on rings and could be drawn aside. There was a fireplace, a table on the left hand side of the curtain, the large green chair, and a green mat, patterned in black with twining lines. Every detail con-

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tributed to Quinton's distorted pleasure senses. For light there was a small Oriental lamp hanging from the ceiling. It was round, and, when examined closely, its grooved bowl appeared to be made of a single coiled serpent, whose head and tail joined above the flame. A brass chain suspended it to the green roof. There were also, added later, two silver candlesticks, with silver asps twisted round their bases. On the table was placed the box of the slim green book, with the twin silver snakes that he had bought in Paris. Their upturned open mouths gaped towards the ceiling.

From this point begins the last period of Quinton's concealed insanity. We have traced so far as we could the insidious progress of the disease, and the futility of his one real effort to escape it. It now filled the largest part of his life, and he sought only how to indulge in it, and how to keep

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it hidden from his wife. Day after day he would slip away from his painting-room to his study, pass through the green curtain into the alcove, and light the candles and the lamp. Forbidden pleasures are the sweeter the longer we delay them. Just as when he was a boy, he had postponed to the last moment his visit to the Reptile House, so now he would sit for hours, smoking rich opiate cigarettes, watching the silver snakes. For hours he would smoke and gaze, and remember past ages, that seemed embedded in his consciousness, when generations of naked men and women, with brown skins, had worshipped the twin snakes, sacrificing now one and then another of their number, lest the poison bags of their captive gods should wither for want of use. He would dream and imagine to himself the underground temples, where the priests of the cult, with bleared eyes and faces blanched by the

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darkness, kept a perpetual watch on the image of the twin snakes, while living serpents coiled about their wrists. And at last he would put out the candles and take incense from a snake-skin box, and burn it on powdered charcoal in the gaping mouths. He would unlock the flat black case, and take out the slim book that held the mysteries of his fantastic cult. Upon the patterned mat he would perform strange obeisances, and then stand watching the grey and violet smoke that rose and curled towards the roof filling the alcove with a pungent smell.

Then, of a sudden, he would hear his wife's footsteps approaching, and, like a guilty boy, would hastily lock up the book and lie back smoking in his chair.

Jacquotte, practical, unsentimental, would come in, petulantly pull aside the curtain, and, holding her nose, remind him of his neglected work, of his neglected wife, and

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of the stupidity of wasting the best hours of the daylight in an artificial darkness.

He could answer her nothing, and his silence under her attacks exasperated her. She asked him if he withheld the meaning of his doings from her, as from a person of insufficient intellect to sympathise. He tried to pacify her, but could never bring himself to the point of explaining. She had never loved him, and within fourteen months of their marriage was secretly antagonistic. Yet this secrecy hurt her. She took it as an insult, and did all in her power to hit back. She found out his vulnerable points and tortured them when she could. Her conscious stabs he put down to her ignorance of his disease, and strengthened himself to endure them as proofs of his success in concealing it.

One morning she asked him "if he was going to paint or spend the day in his snake-hole?"

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## The Little Silver Snakes

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It was not the first question of the kind that she had asked. He struggled to paint, worrying all the time. Had she discovered? Did she guess? By noon he was in a state of irritation and nervousness that made work impossible. He spent the rest of the day in the alcove, doing his best to stupefy himself with the incense and the powerful cigarettes. The nervous excitement of that afternoon helped him to the conception of his most famous picture. He imagined it on the blank green wall, as he lay in the big chair, spent the evening with paper and pencil over its composition, and, in the morning, started the painting and worked in a fury. The canvas and colour were alive beneath his brush. As if by magic appeared the gloom of incense and faint lamps, and tense Eastern faces through the veil of smoke, watching two coiled and swinging snakes upon a flat white stone. A child, half-

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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stupefied but yet frightened, lay bound and naked close to the stone, and in the front of the picture, silhouettes against the pale smoke and glimmering lamps, were three gaunt robed figures, ready to place the child on the stone of sacrifice, with the two waiting snakes. On all the faces in the picture was a curious ecstasy, and one of them was a study of himself. He finished the picture in two days of almost incessant painting.

On the third he was exhausted. They had accepted an invitation to a small supper and dance, one of those little mad frolics that still make Chelsea a bearable, and even enjoyable place. The Dakmars, painters, husband and wife, were to call for them at seven. Quinton said that he was too tired to go, and Jacquotte, to his immense relief, did not argue the matter. He could not have borne an argument just then.



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## The Little Silver Snakes

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He took Dakmar into his painting room when they came, while the wives of the two painters were busy in Jacquotte's room over one or other of the feminine details that have always to be thought of at the last moment on these occasions. The artists smoked a cigarette together over the new picture, which Quinton refused to discuss, though he was glad enough to hear it praised. He saw the three into the carriage, and heard Dakmar say to Jacquotte: "Quinton's done a fine thing with that new picture, but it's an insane idea." "Yes," said Jacquotte, "he's absolutely snake-mad." The carriage drove off.

He went back into the house more miserable than ever. Did his wife know? It was possible that the thing had slipped lightly from her lips, and that she had no knowledge of the horrible truth of what she was saying. He took a liqueur bottle,

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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and a new box of cigarettes, and lit the lamp and candles in the recess. He poured out a slender glass of an amber liqueur, that shone with purple shadows as he held it to the light, sipped it and lit a cigarette.

He smoked on and on, and drank three of the tiny glasses. Then he decided to let himself go. Jacquotte would not be back till two at the earliest. He went to his bedroom, undressed, and came back in his dressing-gown, a gorgeous robe of crimson with gold braid. He put small logs and handfuls of shredded scented wood on the fire in the recess, set incense burning in the mouths of the snakes, and, with his feet bare to the flames and the dressing gown rolled about his limbs, lay down and smoked again. When the room was as hot as an orchid-house, he dropped the cigarette behind the grate and vehemently, even furiously, threw his dressing-gown aside. The slim, green book was in

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## The Little Silver Snakes

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his hand. He kissed it, pressing his lips to the smooth leather as to a woman's skin. Laying his fingers on the necks of the metal snakes, he moved them slowly up and down and muttered strange words to himself, according to the ritual, with an extraordinary ecstasy in the performance of the long-forgotten rites. Never had he entered so far into the ceremony. Never, he told himself, had he come so near its inner mystery. The fascination of the twisted snakes, with the long plumes of smoke rising from their mouths in the stillness of the room, held him and made him drunk. He felt that inexplicable exaltation that is felt by priests and all who perform, with rigorous detail, elaborate and recondite ceremonials. His was a finer ecstasy than he had won even from his painting, or from his love for his wife—that love that was now more like fear.

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It seemed to him that the silver snakes were alive and moving beneath his touch, that their narrow necks waved languidly from side to side, and that he heard the rasp of their metal scales as the coiled circles of their bodies slid round on the silver base. He looked up and saw that the coiled snake that made the bowl of the suspended lamp was creeping round and round upon itself, round and round, so that the lamp was like a humming top, in which the light, like the noise, was steady, while the body of the thing was whirling faster than life. The silver asps were crawling up the candlesticks, and the black lines on the green mat were twining and intertwining like a new spawned brood of serpents.

For a long time he lost himself in this hallucination, and then, suddenly flinging on his dressing-gown, he dashed out of the alcove, through the study, upstairs to his

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painting-room, coming back with the picture of the snake-worshippers, scarcely dry upon the canvas. He set it up, just as it was, unframed, on the black table behind the silver snakes.

Heaping more wood on the fire, he lay back again in the chair. Yes, it was as he thought. The faces in his picture were alive. The snakes were moving on the canvas as well as in the green room. They were twisting slowly on the stone slab, their necks swinging in languorous expectation. The muscles grew tense in the faces of the half-invisible spectators. Their mouths moved, and Quinton distinguished a low chant. The three priests made signs over the child, and lifted him towards the slab. Suddenly the man whom Quinton had painted in his own likeness threw himself before them on the stone. One of the cobras buried its fangs in his head ; the other coiled on to his heaving shoulder

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and swayed there, this way and that, as if uncertain where to strike.

And then Jacquotte came home.

He heard her open the study door, and composed himself with a superhuman effort of will. She pulled aside the green curtain and ran like a white satin sylph into the recess. She was very happy, and perhaps had taken a little more wine than usual. That at least would account for her gaiety and her wish to have everybody, even the exasperating Quinton, as merry-hearted as herself. Running forward on the tips of her little white shoes, she kissed Quinton lightly on the forehead, and then started back almost petulantly at the sight of his hollow cheeks and the blue shadows under his eyes.

“ You’ve made yourself look a perfect fright ! ” she said, flapping a tiny handkerchief under her nose. “ What have you been doing here with your incense and your

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silly snakes? I believe you've killed yourself over that mad picture. No one has a right to look as if they had been watching their own funeral just when I am happy. Be happy, can't you?"

"Did you have a decent time?" Quinton heard himself say.

"I danced till I forgot I had any feet. You ought to have been there, instead of waiting here like a ghost to spoil things when I come home. Mr Dakmar was telling everybody about your snake picture. He says it is a successful product of insanity. Upon my word, I believe he's right. But I'm going to be nice to you. You may take off my shoes."

Quinton shuddered. The room was still spinning about him, but he forced himself to bend and take off the little satin shoe from the foot that she placed on his knee.

"Now the other," she said laughing, "and then you shall watch me undress,

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and I'll tell you all about it."

He took off the other, rather clumsily, because his sight was blurred.

"Do talk," she said. "You mumble in here all day to your wretched snakes, and yet you never have a word for me. Nasty creepy things."

She ran on the tips of her toes to the table, emptied the incense into the fire, and hung a tiny satin shoe in the mouth of each snake. It was sacrilege of the most terrible kind.

"Don't!" said Quinton, as he saw her empty out the incense. He tried not to show his agitation.

"Jacquotte, you must not do that!"

She laughed at him, and he broke out into mumblings of strange incantations from the green book.

"Don't be foolish! Behave," she said; "talk to me and be nice." She took the silver snakes and held them behind her



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back, standing laughing in front of him.

"Put them down," he pleaded.

"You shan't have your silly snakes till you're good," she teased.

"Jacquotte, for God's sake put them down! You cannot know what you are doing."

"Yes, I do ; I've got the two snakes you paid such a lot for in Paris, and I've got hold of their necks so that they can't bite, and if you don't look pleasant at once I shall drop them in the fire. Really . . . . No. . . . Don't!"

Quinton was trying to take them from her. He knew he could not much longer control himself. She twisted away from him, with her back to the fire.

"Let go, Keith, you bear! I'll drop them!"

He made a furious effort to seize them, holding her to him, and reaching out after the hand with the snakes. There was a

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click of metal on stone, and the silver snakes dropped into the back of the grate.

She was a little frightened at what she had done, but the sight of her husband terrified her to calm. "They will rise from fire!" he cried, and clung shaking to the mantelpiece, muttering words that had no meaning for her. For a moment she thought of rescuing the snakes, but they were already melting in golden, irrecoverable streams that flowed like glowing lava through the burning wood. She watched her husband, shaking from head to foot. He looked at her, and as she saw his eyes she suddenly realised that he was mad, and ran out of the alcove and out of the room, locking the door behind her.

Quinton, at last completely possessed by his mania, did not try to pursue her, but grovelled on the mat in front of the fire, watching the drip, drip of the

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molten metal as it fell through the grate.

Of course that was the end. She had him examined, found insane, and imprisoned in a comfortable private asylum, where he paints weird pictures that give him apparent pleasure. He does not realise at all that he is mad, but, as his pictures are taken away from him as soon as they are painted, believes that they go to the Academy and win an immense success. His doctor has sham press-notices set up in type and posted to him, and Quinton is perfectly satisfied. A curious effect of his mania is that he sees all blues greens, and paints them accordingly. His case is really an interesting one. Believers in reincarnation might find subject for thought in his vivid visions of the East which he had never seen. Students of heredity might give us some suggestion from the green book that had evidently exerted some strange influence on his father.

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Anyhow there can be no doubt that, now that he is wholly mad, he is far more happy than in that time of acute loneliness when he was hiding a secret insanity even from the eyes of his wife.

As for Jacquotte, she lives very pleasantly in Paris, on the money of her incarcerated husband. She visits Quinton once a year, and, in the society of her friends, has trained herself to a nicety in putting the right amount of sorrow and the correct quantity of resignation into occasional laments for his incurability, that win her some sympathy, and a little pleasant notice of her interesting position.

*Cartmel, 1905.*

# The Ageing Faun

TO LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE



## The Ageing Faun

“**A**ND the red squirrels covered the body with the russet leaves of the beech tree, and the ants carried away the flesh from the bones in small morsels, and hid them in the heart of the earth. And, long after, men found bones and the skull of a man with short pointed horns on it, and beside them the dried hooves of a goat. And they buried them.”

So says the book, and this is the story :

Among the lesser things that do not age or die are fauns. Goat-footed and with shaggy thighs, sharp-faced and with curling brown hair between their little horns, they play for ever in the woods, owning no fealty but to Pan, himself a goat-foot, and to the curly-haired Apollo. They are merry and glad, without care for the succeeding days. They love the nymphs with

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a light and painless love, the dryads of the trees, the naiads of the singing streams. Their friends are the birds, the squirrels, the mice, and all wild things that, fearing man, find in the fauns their playfellows. They lie in the deep woods and dance in the sunlight. At night they leave the woods and leap the haystacks in the fields, and run the countryside in their careless merriment. They pair with their own folk, the nymphs immortal as themselves, and leave the milkmaid to the shepherd.

But among the fauns was one who was sportive above all others. None leapt the cocks of hay so merrily as he. Not one could chase the owl so swiftly along the moonlit borders of a wood. Not one could click his heels in air so lightly in the open spaces of the undergrowth. The dryads laughed when he came by, and fled, but he was swifter. The naiads floating in the stream would dive before his merry face



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and play bo-peep with him among the pools. The squirrels loved him and pelted him with nuts as he ran beneath their trees. The nightingale would give him note for note as he played upon his wooden pipe. The dormouse cleaned its whiskers in his sinewy palm. No beast or bird was frightened of him. His fellows loved him and he loved them back, and shared their games. But his heart held more love than theirs. He overheard the murmurings of the wind because he loved them, and because he loved them, the trees in the wood seemed to wave their green and drop their gold for him alone. His heart was a phial that overflowed, but he ran laughing in the woods, and in the night his merry laugh was tossed about the country-side.

He was curious, too, and questioned things. He would know what lay behind the distant hill, and where the rainbow

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dropped its shining feet. His fellows were more careless. Enough for them were laughter, song, and whirling dance, and so, for all his love of them, he often fared alone.

One evening, when he had left the woods and leapt the hedgerows in the moonlight and was far down the valley, he saw a girl in a blue smock leading a dappled cow. Not far away were yellow lights in the windows of a farm. He followed the girl, for her face was fair in the moonlight. And as he followed her, the fluid that was spilt from his heart was drawn back into it, and choked it. His life seemed suddenly worthless beside this girl who walked so slowly with the dappled cow. A madness came upon him, and he fled away, leaping the hedgerows, and running hither and thither over the countryside. A pain bit at his heart, and burnt it, and gripped it, and twisted it, and he

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seemed to be looking at the face of the girl over a bar of burning metal. He was frightened, yet he ran back down the valley to the farm; but the amber lights were out, and it lay asleep under the moon.

In the morning the sun shone in the woods, but the faun neither danced nor piped. A dryad passed him and slipped away shyly among the olive shadows of the bushes. He did not follow her, but sang defiantly of his new love. "What is the sunlight to me?" he sang, "or you, little white flashing thing that tempts me to pursue? What are the squirrels or the rustling trees. The sunlight is her laughter; you are her promise, her promise only; the squirrel's eyes are hers, and the rustling of the trees is the music of her smock as she walks through the twilight. I have need of her and not of you, who are nothing to me but for her sake." He stopped, for he did not know her name,

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but knew only that she was a daughter of men and could have no part in the things of the wood. He crouched under a beech-tree and blinked in the sun's eye.

At nightfall he ran hastily down the valley and leapt the farmyard gate, and looked through the door of the farm. The girl was stitching a smock in the firelight, and singing as she stitched. The faun listened, though the sweetness of her singing pained him. The lark's song had not moved him so, nor the nightingale's. Yet both their songs are sweet.

The next night he came early to the farm and stood in the doorway, looking into the room, and wondering when she would step in her blue smock into the golden light of the fire. There were steps behind him on the firm earth of the yard. The girl was walking from the cowshed, and the faun withdrew himself into the shadow that he might see her as she

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crossed the threshold. His hooves clicked. She started, hearing the noise, and saw his knotted body in the darkness. She was frightened and ran in. An old man hobbled out, but the faun had already leapt the gate and was racing his shadow to the woods.

The pain at his heart was a stabbing knife that twisted in the wound. He cried piteously as he ran, and did not stay when he came to his home. The moon sank, but he ran on, a little slower for the dark. Sleeping birds woke as he crushed through the brambles beneath them. They shivered the silence with the clatter of leaves and wings. The crimson pennons of dawn waved to him in a wilder country, where men never came, but he ran on while they turned to gold and fainted in blue, and waved again behind him in the evening, when, on the slope of a wooded hill, he found Apollo, the curly-headed, sitting on

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the fallen trunk of an oak, watching the gambols of a crowd of fauns. Beside Apollo, hairy Pan lay half asleep in a bed of green moss, blinking at the fauns with drowsy eyes. They were dancing and leaping and clicking their heels together. Two of them were playing on wooden pipes.

The faun did not heed them, but came and stood before Apollo, stooping a little and panting, because he was tired. And his dancing brothers left their sport and crowded about Apollo to hear what this wild faun had to say, whose rough hair was clotted with mud and matted with brambles.

“What is it, you travelled one?” asked Apollo, smiling, and twisting a wreath of oak twigs covered with leaves. “Why do you stop my fauns at play? Speak, so that they may dance again; for they were dancing merrily.”

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“My master,” said the faun, and his voice shook. “My master, there is one whose fingers hold my heart. I would leave being a faun, and become a man—such a man as works in the farms, and a pretty man, clean-limbed and tall, with hair curling as thine is, my master.”

The hairy Pan rose on his elbow and looked at him with blinking eyes.

Apollo smiled. “You wish to be a man,” he said, “but why so pretty?”

“I love a child, a girl with a blue smock, who leads a dappled cow. I would that she should love me too.”

“What of the nymphs and your woodland life?” said Apollo. “Forget this child who will be an old woman and ugly in her day, with a cracked voice. Dance with your fellows in the sun, laugh in the moon’s face, and forget her.”

“My master, I cannot,” said the faun.

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"A quaint faun, indeed," said Apollo. "Do you know that though I am a God I cannot twist the world to my pleasure. Fauns and the daughters of the farms are not for each other. If I make you man and you wed this girl, she will die with her first child, and you, who will then be faun again, may not carry her memory among the fauns, but will grow old and die, as they do not."

"Die, my master? What is die? It cannot be stronger than my love."

"Perhaps not," said Apollo, and his eyes saddened for a moment.

"You will make me a man," said the faun.

Apollo touched him. And all the fauns who had crowded round, fled away and hid themselves in the undergrowth, for he stood a naked man among them all.

"Go now," said Apollo, "you frighten my dancing fauns."



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And Pan looked at him sorrowfully and turned away.

The faun, who was now a man and stood there naked in the wood, was frightened at the fair face of Apollo and his flaming hair. He turned and hid himself among the bushes, forgetful of his faunish nature, and fearing lest that splendid god should, in some sudden anger, send a stone to break his skull, or a pointed stick to pin his naked body to a tree.

He crept away, but presently his man's nature waked in him, and between his two lives stretched the burning thread of his love. He stood upright and laughed in the woodland, careless of Apollo. He felt his head that it had no horns, and laughed. He bent and laughed again in gladness, counting the ten toes of the slim feet that had replaced his pointed hooves.

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The sky above him became a blue dome lit with stars, and by them he took his way, and moved painfully through the woodland, not with the leaps and gambols of a faun, but with the earnest footsteps of a man. At sunrise he caught a sheep in a valley and strangled it. He made a knife of a sharp stone and skinned it, and spread it in the sun to dry, and fell asleep beside it, after drinking at a stream from the hollow of his palm.

At night he threw the sheepskin about his shoulders and walked on, and came at next day's dusk to the woods he knew. He met none of his kind, but heard those little noises in the undergrowth by which men learn that they are not alone. He did not heed them but walked on, and came at last to the farm where his love dwelt, and here he knocked at the door and offered himself as a shepherd.

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“Wild man,” said the farmer, “he who carries a sheepskin may well be a wolf and a thief.”

And to this the faun that was now a man and new to men’s ways, could make no reply. But he watched in the firelight the blue smock of his love, and held his hand to his heart for the pain that was there, and waited in silence.

“Daughter,” said the old man, “what do you say to this shepherd who comes in a sheepskin?”

The girl looked him in the eyes and looked away swiftly, and said:—

“I think he is honest.”

“Come then,” said the old man, “here is food; there is bracken in the barn. Eat and sleep, and to-morrow you shall come with me to the uplands.”

And so the merriest of the fauns became a man and shepherd to the sheep of his love’s father. He lived in the uplands with

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## The Hoofmarks of the Faun

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the sheep, and day by day at noon his love came to him with milk and cheese and rye bread, and now and then fruit from the farm, gold apples and green figs. And he would lie in the grass and watch her coming, with the wind playing about her, tossing her hair, and, like a little dog, playing with the hem of her smock.

Day by day she prepared more gladly to carry the shepherd's food. Day by day she stayed longer in the uplands than was needed to empty the basket. Day by day her steps from the farm were more joyous and swift—her steps from the hills more melancholy and slow. And she was for ever washing her smocks in the stream, and smoothing ribbons with which to tie her hair. When that was done the hours were all too long for her, except the hour of noon.

For the shepherd seemed a wilder and a sweeter thing than the men she had seen

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in the villages and farms. The brown of the squirrels was in his eyes also, and leaves in autumn were no more luminous than his skin. His hands were cunning on the flute. His voice danced to music like birds in the wind. He was swifter than the sheep-dog. There was nothing in the world he could not do, she thought, for he seemed to be the world itself. The wind and the streams were echoed when he spoke, and, when he laughed, she saw the sunlight in his eyes.

At the back end of the year, when the sheep came down from the uplands, they were married, and lived together in the farm. The old man, her father, took to the chimney corner and was content, except that sometimes he would remind them that he looked for a grandson. At these times she would look gladly at the shepherd, but he was sorrowful, he knew not why, for,

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though he had forgotten Apollo and the woods, he was afraid.

And in the Spring, when his love ran no longer merrily about her business, when she moved slowly about the house, with solemn eyes that only lit at sight of him, he wept. The old man in the chimney corner chuckled and rubbed his hands, and was vexed with his sorrow. The shepherd did not know why he wept, but took the sheep to the hills, and lay on the uplands with his face in the short grass, and bit the green stems and was sorrowful.

In June, on the eve of midsummer, his love took to her bed. He watched at the bedside and held her hands, and comforted her, saying nothing, but his sorrow was beyond his bearing. The old man sat in the chimney corner below, smiling and listening and waiting. A child was born at midnight. The shepherd took it to the window, and the moonlight showed him it

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was dead. He wrapped it in a cloth and returned to his wife, who smiled in the dusk and died. He gave a great cry that tore his throat, and kissed her, and crouched in the shadow by the bed. He crouched low and his hooves shivered together, for he had become a faun again as Apollo had warned him.

Steps sounded in the house, the stumbling steps of the old man rising from the chimney corner. The faun tore off his clothes, not knowing what he did. His hooves beat the floor, and he threw himself from the window in great fear, finding himself in a house of men. He fled across the farmyard, leapt the gate and ran across the fields, leaping and skipping and groaning to himself.

The old man who had risen from the chimney corner at hearing the faun's cry, took a light and came to the room where he found the two lying dead, and the

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shepherd's clothes still warm, in disorder on the floor. "He has gone mad," he said, blind to his own sorrow. "He has gone mad. He has a good heart. Poor boy! Poor boy!"

But the faun fled away to the woods and did not rest till he reached his home. He lay in the bracken and slept fitfully, and woke tired. And in the morning his fellows found him and came about him, laughing and clicking with their heels. They asked him where he had been and what he had done. He could not tell them because he did not know. "I have lost! . . . I have lost! . . ." But he could say no more, for he had not yet learnt that he had lost his immortality. So they threw berries at him and left him.

He crept to the beech-tree he had loved, and lay there with his back against the trunk. The sunlight played through the wood, and a little wind shook the leaves



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into a thin laughter. Mice ran hither and thither, and stirred the russet carpet that the trees had spread in the winter to warm the dryads' feet. The faun heard them—but did not turn his head, nor did he watch, as once he used, the squirrels balancing with waving tails among the branches. Age had fallen suddenly upon him. His eyes were hardened and his ears were callous. The merriest of the fauns was grown as listless as a man. He had forgotten the shepherd he had been, and all that happened. He was again a faun, but the phial of his heart was drained and withered as an empty skin, and he could take no joy because he could give no love.

He remembered only what Apollo had said, sitting on the oak trunk in the woods, and the eyes of Pan looking at him: "Not as other fauns, but grow old and die also." He had forgotten his love, but remembered

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the dead things in the farm from which he had fled. Would he, too, grow suddenly cold. He had been one with the sunlight, the wind, and the anemones, and all the creatures of the wood, but now their life no longer filled his veins. And when the dryads, who had heard of his return, came to be pursued by him, he stared past them with a dull eye at the sunlight on the hazels.

“He is swift and merry,” said the dryads, “swiftest and merriest among the fauns. He will pursue, and with frightened laughter we will fly—but not too fast.” They came near him shyly, holding to the slim stems of the birches. Then, when they saw his eyes they fled silently, with grey faces. For they saw more clearly than the fauns, and knew that he would die, and so could have no part with them in the pleasures that cost nothing and are not paid for in mortality.

For three months the faun lay in the

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woods waiting for his death. And time, that he had never counted before, seemed long. And he could not understand.

At last he died. His limbs, no longer shaggy and firm, were weak and hollow-jointed. His hair was grey ; his hooves were soft and useless. And, in the autumn twilight the woods were still, and the fauns stayed their gambols in fright, and the dryads couched in the shadows of the oaks, and the squirrels held their nuts untasted, and the mice forbore to stir the fallen leaves. For the merriest of the fauns, grown old and dying, was singing to himself. He sang of the fading of his life ; of the dulling of the sunlight ; of the drouth of wine in the veins ; of the withering of limbs. He remembered the words of Apollo, but knew not what he had done that he should die, nor what it was that had drowned the sunlight in shadow. But he was glad to die. And he died.

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“ And the red squirrels covered his body with the russet leaves of the beech tree ; and the ants carried away the flesh from the bones in small morsels, and hid them in the heart of the earth. And, long after, men found bones and the skull of a man with short pointed horns on it, and beside them the dried hooves of a goat. And they buried them.”



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